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COLERIDGE AS A PHILOLOGIAN

Samuel Taylor Coleridge—logician, metaphysician, bard—was also, according to his lights, a scholar. The great and disjointed corpus of his works is freighted to a surprising degree with learning real or feigned, and his contemporaries were wont to be not less amazed at his erudition than they were startled at the occasional wildness of judgment and apparent indifference to exactitude which attended it. No survey of Coleridge's attainments in the field of literary and philological as opposed to philosophical scholarship has hitherto been made. The subject is, however, an interesting one, and an examination of his pretensions and accomplishments, a somewhat careful testing of the fact and fancy in his scholarly pronouncements, besides illustrating a comparatively unregarded aspect of his relation to his age, will be found to open a new approach to the understanding of his peculiar intellectual constitution and to throw important light on his critical and imaginative work.

We may consider at the outset his own attitude toward the sort of philological study in which at various periods of his life he found himself deeply engaged. The following passage, written at Göttingen in 1799, affords important evidence as to his point of view:

My God! a miserable poet must he be, and a despicable metaphysician, whose acquirements have not cost him more trouble and reflection than all the learning of Tooke, Porson, and Parr united. With the advantage of a great library, learning is nothing—methinks, merely a sad excuse for being idle. Yet a man gets reputation by it, and reputation gets money; and for reputation I don't care a damn, but money—yes—money I must get by all honest ways. Therefore at the end of two or three years, if God grant me life, expect to see me come out with some horribly learned book, full of manuscript quotations from Laplandish and Patagonian authors, possibly on the striking resemblance of the Sweogothian and Sanscrit languages, and so on.¹

In regarding the labor of thought as infinitely more severe than that of acquisition Coleridge is undoubtedly faithful to his own

¹ *Letters* (edited by E. H. Coleridge), p. 299.

experience. The pretense of a purely commercial object in his studies is, I think, affectation. Certain it is that he always considered sound knowledge an indispensable basis of poetic as well as of critical achievement. In a letter of 1796 to Joseph Cottle he gives the following notable prescription for the preparation of an epic poem:

I should not think of devoting less than twenty years to an epic poem. Ten years to collect my materials, and warm my mind with universal science. I should be a tolerable mathematician. I would thoroughly understand Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Optics, and Astronomy; Botany, Metallurgy, Fossilism; Chemistry; Geology, Anatomy, Medicine; then the mind of man in all Travels, Voyages and Histories. So would I spend ten years; the next five in the composition of the poem, and the five last in the correction of it.¹

Ludicrously Coleridgian as this may sound, it reveals an attitude of mind which is sincere and characteristic, and it serves to direct attention to a genuine and independent scholarly consciousness in Coleridge, as much at variance with the common conception of him as mere heir to misty speculations and poetic dreams, as it was with certain tendencies in his strangely contradictory nature. He differs sharply, be it observed, from other outstanding figures in the romantic group. For pure antiquarianism like that of Scott he had no interest. Neither is he led to seek the past in the service of the pictorial imagination. His study was directed rather to the search for truth; it embraced physical science as well as language, literature, and metaphysics; and it resulted in an attitude essentially akin to that of the great founders of modern scholarship. Whatever his shortcomings may have been, Coleridge was yet touched by the scientific viewpoint, as evidenced in a sense of the need of methods and standards for the testing of literary and historic fact, and of the importance of correct manuscript readings, of more accurate translation and interpretation made in the light of fuller linguistic knowledge, and of the historical approach to literature through an understanding of the conditions surrounding it.

For the practice of an exact and far-reaching scholarship Coleridge had the initial advantage of a really competent training. The rigid classical discipline of Christ's Hospital was completed at Cambridge, and in both institutions Coleridge distinguished himself, save for a

¹ Cottle's *Early Recollections*, I (1837), 192.

single year of unaccountable mental disorganization, by his effort and his proficiency. The zeal of acquisition attended him also during the subsequent era of pantisocracy and love, when his association with Robert Southey, while it deepened his enthusiasm, somewhat altered its direction.¹

It is, however, the sojourn in Germany which is really epoch-making in Coleridge's intellectual development, and that in a way which appears not to have been clearly recognized by his biographers. It is not simply that he was among the first of Englishmen to value contemporary German literature, for here William Taylor, of Norwich, had been his predecessor in the field, while DeQuincey and Carlyle were soon to go far beyond him. What distinguishes Coleridge's contact with modern Germany was the fact that he felt more than others its intellectual currents, not in philosophy alone,² but in science and literary scholarship as well. It is of quite as much importance that he submitted himself for a half-year to the discipline of one of its most progressive universities, at the moment when the fruits of the early development of a new learning were just beginning to be felt, as it is that he met and talked with Klopstock. Although Coleridge had been led to Germany in the first instance by the attraction of Schiller, Voss, and Wieland, he actually concerned himself, after a brief period spent in mastering the language, scarcely at all with the writers after Lessing.

The avowed object of the expedition was to acquire the language and "to furnish ourselves with a tolerable knowledge of natural science." Separating from the Wordsworths after a few days in Hamburg, Coleridge went into scholarly retirement at Ratzeburg and set about the study of German according to a definitely conceived and excellent theory of linguistic acquisition.³ In February, 1799, he matriculated at Göttingen and settled down for five months of practically uninterrupted study.

Coleridge's choice of a university is of considerable importance. Göttingen was at this time pre-eminently the German university for

¹ The record of the books drawn by Coleridge and Southey from the Bristol Library (see *Chamber's Journal*, 1890, p. 75) gives the earliest evidences of Coleridge's interest in the literature of Italy and the North and in the minor Elizabethan drama.

² Coleridge remarks (*Biographia literaria* [ed. Shawcross], I, 141) that he became acquainted with the German philosophers for the most part "long afterwards."

³ See *Biographia literaria*, chap. x, note.

English students, and Coleridge, through his special relations to the faculty, was in a particularly favorable position to feel the scholarly and intellectual impulses of the institution.¹ Göttingen was then the most modern and universal, as it was the youngest, of the German universities. The presence of Gesner, followed in 1763 by Heyne, had made it the leader of the new humanism which was revolutionizing the study of the classics in the German universities² and was already producing its effect on German literature and thought. There is evidence in Coleridge's later work that he felt the stimulus of these new ideals. The cultural view of ancient literature, championed by Heyne, involving the idea of considering the classics in relation to the total civilization of antiquity—its customs, mythology, art, and thought—was in entire accord with Coleridge's sympathies and interests. Something of this he may indeed have obtained from Blackwell, Wood, and other English sources, but in general it was the merely learned attitude which prevailed in the English universities where he had received his initiation into classical studies, while in Göttingen, under the leadership of Heyne, the bent of scholarship had been determined by the more liberal humanism of the new era. Winckleman and Herder had been Heyne's friends and correspondents, Wolf was his pupil, and it is unlikely that Coleridge should have escaped the enthusiasm of the place and hour. The fruits of the historical attitude in general and, as we shall see, of the new classical scholarship in particular are apparent everywhere in his criticism.

Of greater importance, however, for Coleridge's future development was his contact with the more novel current of German scholarship which was just beginning to be felt in Göttingen. The championship of the older German literature as an object of appreciation and study and the corresponding philological interest in the Teutonic dialects were, it is true, in the hands of other men than the Göttingen professors. A regular professor of German literature was not

¹ Coleridge sought out Heyne, librarian and reigning professor of the day, who received him with special courtesy and gave him unlimited privileges in the library (*Letters*, p. 279). This is not surprising considering Heyne's fondness for English literature. See Heeren's *Christian Gottlob Heyne*. It was, however, the famous physiologist and anthropologist Blumenbach who ultimately did for him the honors of the institution. He was an intimate in the latter's house and made the ascent of the Brocken in company with his son.

² See Paulsen, *Geschichte des gelehrten Unterrichts*, Book IV, chap. ii.

appointed there until after Coleridge's time,¹ but the close association of Heyne with men like Herder, Tieck, and Schlegel, and the existence in Göttingen of the Deutsche Gesellschaft, founded by Gesner for the improvement of the German language through translations from ancient and modern authors and for the study of the poetry, history, and antiquities of the fatherland, was sufficient to insure a pervasive interest in these matters in the academic community. It is important to note that neither the teachers nor the students at Göttingen were thoroughgoing specialists. The temper of the time encouraged men like Heyne and Blumenbach to range beyond their special fields.² This, with the absence of a chair of German literature, explains the somewhat surprising fact that Coleridge received his instruction in the Teutonic dialects from Thomas Tychsen, specialist in oriental literature and professor of theology from 1785 to 1834.³ With him Coleridge, reading privately, for he gave no lectures in this field, learned "as much of Gothic as sufficed to make me acquainted with its grammar and the radical words of most frequent occurrence," and read through, with occasional assistance, Otfrid and "the most important remains of the Theotiscan or the transitional state of the Teutonic language from the Gothic to the Old German of the Swabian period." He made what must have been his first acquaintance with Continental mediaeval romance and "labored through" the master-singers, including Hans Sachs.⁴ The interest of Coleridge was at the same time literary and philological. He had come for a knowledge of German, and his conception of a mastery of the language involved a knowledge of its history, just as the ideal which he set for himself as an expounder of modern German literature involved familiarity with that literature from its primitive beginnings.⁵ The historical and philological purpose so clearly conceived shows Coleridge to have

¹ For information as to the curriculum, faculty, etc., at Göttingen see J. S. Pütter, *Versuch einer academischen Gelehrten-geschichte von der Georg-Augustus Universität zu Göttingen*, 1765-1838.

² Paulsen, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³ E. H. Coleridge is in error in supposing the Tychsen from whom Coleridge received instruction to have been Oläus Tychsen, professor at Rostock in Mecklenburg-Schwerin (*Letters*, p. 298, note).

⁴ See the account of his studies in *Biographia literaria*, chap. x (Shawcross, ed., I, 138 ff.).

⁵ He felt also that his knowledge of the English language had benefited by his study of the Teutonic dialects. See *Letters*, pp. 267-68.

been in line with the scholarly movement which, in men like Ritson and Warton, marked the development of English romanticism. The uniqueness of Coleridge's position consisted in his having been the first Englishman to receive this historical training in German as distinct from English and general Teutonic literature, and in his having done so under the scholarly methods of a modern German university.

Nor did Coleridge undergo the discipline in any listless fashion. "For these four months I have worked harder than, I trust almighty God, I shall ever have occasion to work again," he writes to Wedgwood in May, 1799,¹ and in the *Biographia* he remarks: "I made the best use of my time and means; and there is no period of my life on which I can look back with such unmingled satisfaction." The half-year was indeed one of solid and significant accomplishment. Short as was the period of Coleridge's contact with the scholarship of modern Germany, it left an impress on his interests and ways of thought which is not to be neglected in the study of his literary life.

The fruits of Coleridge's academic training and of the private researches with which he supplemented it we may now examine. We must omit the long tale of his philosophical studies and fail to take account, for the most part, of his wide reading in English literature. Even aside from this his range is surprising enough. For the classics he maintained an enthusiasm throughout his life, and the evidence of his wide acquaintance with Greek authors is everywhere in his work. The interest in Greek is partly philological. He compiled for the use of his children a Greek grammar, called by his nephew "a truly marvellous monument of minute logical accuracy,"² he projected at one time a Greek lexicon,³ and he frequently undertook the arduous work of an emender of texts and improver of translations. The value of his labors in this field is not very considerable, but the simple fact of his patient concern with these minutiae is not without its significance. If not quite a Porson in classical philology, Coleridge has enough of the scholarly consciousness to value accuracy of text and rendering as an ideal.

¹ Cottle's *Reminiscences*, p. 427.

² See editor's note to *Table Talk (Works)*, VI, 284.

³ *Biographia literaria*, chap. xii, note (Shawcross, ed., I, 164).

Of greater intrinsic interest are the evidences of Coleridge's aliveness to the broader problems of classical scholarship. Many of his more modern views are undoubtedly the fruit of the German contact; they are, however, usually propounded and argued for in characteristic fashion, as if they were entirely original. Coleridge, as is well known and as he himself avowed, was always sublimely indifferent to distinctions of intellectual proprietorship. Thus he was a consistent advocate of the composite authorship of the *Iliad*,¹ having, according to his own statement, reasoned it out on the basis of hints afforded by Vico in his *Scienza nova*. The hint in Vico was broad enough, amounting to an exposition of the theory in its essential features, but that Coleridge should not have known Wolf's *Prolegomena*, which had appeared in 1795, or should have heard nothing of the controversy which was raging in the Göttingen circle in his day, exceeds belief.²

In the field of classical tragedy Coleridge was perhaps more capable than any other Englishman of his time, by his training and endowment, of interpreting the best that had been said and done abroad. It has not been sufficiently recognized that his scholarship here put him in relation with a very important side of contemporary German activity which remained untouched by Taylor, or DeQuincey, or Carlyle. The fundamental principles of ancient drama expounded in the lectures of 1818³ he derived from the *Vorlesungen* of Schlegel, who had been a pupil of Heyne's at Göttingen just before Coleridge's time, and whose work is in a broad sense the outcome of the humanistic movement to interpret ancient literature in the light of ancient life and thought. Especially important as opening up a vast field of modern research is Coleridge's endeavor to study Greek tragedy from the standpoint of the more primitive and ritualistic aspects of Greek religion. In his *Essay on the Fundamental Position of the Mysteries in Relation to Greek Tragedy*⁴ he makes the

¹ *Works*, IV, 301; cf. *Table Talk* (*Works*) VI, 312-13.

² Heyne had himself handled the subject tentatively in his *De antiqua Homeri lectione* before the Göttingen academy. See Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, III, 41. The controversy on the subject between Wolf and Heyne began in 1797.

³ *Works*, IV, 1 ff. See Anna A. Helmholtz, "The Indebtedness of Samuel Taylor Coleridge to August Wilhelm von Schlegel," *University of Wisconsin Bulletin* ("Phil. and Lit. Series"), III, No. 4 (1907), pp. 322-66.

⁴ Summary in *Works*, IV, 366 ff. Cf. the essay on the *Prometheus*, read before the Royal Society of Literature, May 18, 1825, *Works*, IV, 344 ff.

distinction between the autochthonous worship of the ancient inhabitants of the Peloponnesus and the Olympian system, in a manner which looks forward to the recent work of Professor Murray and Miss Harrison, and he sought to find in the "secret doctrines of the Eleusynian and Samothracian mysteries" the ultimate explanation of ancient drama. This is a line of thought which Coleridge could not have derived from English sources, and it is not, like the critical discussions in the public lectures, based on Schlegel. The true source of these speculations lies in the lucubrations of the theorizing mythologists, who, following Heyne, had dwelt on the distinction between the older and later myths and had emphasized the mysteries, the Bacchic worship, and the Egyptian and Phoenician influences on the more primitive and essential forms of Greek worship. Creuzer's famous *Symbolik und Mythologie* (1810 ff.) contains much that is parallel with Coleridge's thought, but it is Schelling's pamphlet *Ueber die Gottheiten von Samothrace* (1815) to which Coleridge is directly indebted. Belief in the philosophic wisdom of the ancient myths, which is shared by Creuzer and Schelling, underlies Coleridge's interpretation of the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, and his discussion of the Asiatic and Greek mythologies¹ takes all its detail, without acknowledgment, from Schelling. What interested Coleridge chiefly in this new line of investigation was the possibility it seemed to open up of finding in the Greek system an echo of the revealed religion of the Hebrews, transmitted through Phoenicia and Egypt. This historic error haunted Coleridge's thought, it distorted his view of the significance of recent developments in Egyptian archaeology, and it rendered him incapable of making fruitful use of the new insight which his studies had given him into the essence of Greek worship, or of applying scientifically the analogies which he suggests with the religious observance of primitive peoples like the American Indians. Both Creuzer and Schelling had recognized the fact that their researches tended to confirm the older idea of the Hebraic origin of Greek mythology, but they had done so tentatively and with the warning that God had left no people without a witness of the truth. The religious and conservative-minded Coleridge followed the *ignis*

¹ *Works*, IV, 309 ff. A reference to Schelling and Creuzer is given by the American editor.

fatuus which they had shunned, and the light which was in him became darkness.

With regard to legitimate Hebrew scholarship the present writer is unable to judge either of the originality or of the authenticity of the doctrine which Coleridge was fond of dispensing from his seat in Highgate. Certain it is that he had a yearning, at least, toward thoroughgoing orientalism as the basis for a proper comprehension of the Bible and was not blind to the importance of the higher criticism of his time. "I wish I understood Arabic," he remarks, "but it is not worth while to undergo the labour necessary to get any oriental tongue but Hebrew."

Another persistent interest of Coleridge's, fostered by his German studies but already manifested in his early years, is philology in the narrower sense of linguistics. Coleridge was undoubtedly fond of language study, both as a means of wider literary acquisition and for its own sake. Of his facility in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew and in the Germanic dialects I have already spoken. French he read with difficulty, preferring German translations of French works. His Italian he learned at Malta and during the seven months' sojourn in Italy. He could understand the spoken language well enough to converse with the elder Rossetti, the latter speaking Italian and Coleridge English. He read with facility and appears to have gone through the major Italian writers in the original;¹ but his pretensions, as usual, outran his accomplishment. His shortcomings are painfully apparent in his marginalia to Cary's *Dante*, where his attempts to correct the translation are in every case in vain. Coleridge's interest in the northern literatures had led him at least to dabble in Danish,² and his aspirations at one period extended to the Celtic

¹ See the notes on Petrarch in Coleridge's *Essays and Lectures* ("Everyman's Library"), pp. 226-31. He felt competent to lecture on Italian literature and suggested to Britton in 1819 that the audience should choose its own subjects! Among his projects was a translation of all of Boccaccio's works except the *Decameron* (Letter to Rogers, May, 1815, in P. W. Clayden's *Rogers and His Contemporaries*, I, 192). Fragmentary translations from Italian authors are scattered through his works: from Chiabrera in *The Friend*, essay 8; Machiavelli, *ibid.*, essay 16; Strozzi, *Biographia literaria*, chap. xvi, etc.

² See DeQuincey (ed. Masson), I, 314. Cf. Farley, *Scandinavian Influences in the English Romantic Movement*, p. 218. Coleridge promised translations from Swedish and Danish authors to his 1818 audience, but he deferred them to the end of the course, and there is no evidence that he ever read them. In 1800 he tells Thelwell that he amuses himself by studying the most ancient forms of the northern languages (Letter quoted by J. D. Campbell, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, p. 119). Farley finds no evidence that Coleridge could read Old Norse.

tongues and Basque! Of Coleridge's acquaintance with Spanish I know only that he projected a translation of Cervantes, which in his case is no evidence at all,¹ and that he makes some comments on the genius of the Spanish language.

The period of Coleridge's activities falls just too early for him to have come in contact with the modern development of scientific philology, but he did share the active interest in etymology and philosophical grammar which preceded in England and Germany the great discoveries of Schlegel, Bopp, and Grimm. His enthusiasm for such study was probably first aroused by Horne Tooke's influential *Diversions of Purley* (1786). He sent or was to have sent a copy of the book to Poole, with a special recommendation in 1798,² and though later he speaks abusively of the work, he borrows from it more than one idea or etymology. In Germany the new emphasis which was being placed on language as the expression of a people's spiritual life doubtless quickened Coleridge's zeal. His study of Gothic and Old High German under Tychsen would of necessity have been mainly philological in its emphasis. Blumenbach, moreover, with his theory of races, opened the way for much speculation on linguistic origins and relations; but on this point Coleridge can hardly be said to have kept abreast of the times. He appears from the remarks in *Table Talk*, February 24, 1827, to have been distantly acquainted with the new developments in the study of linguistic origins opened by the discovery of Sanskrit, but he is still groping after a single original speech, and he declares that the claims of Sanskrit for priority to the Hebrew are ridiculous.³

The evidence of Coleridge's passion for etymology, a passion, by the way, which was inherited by his son Derwent, is scattered everywhere in his writings. Like Carlyle, of whom in this, as in so many things, he was a predecessor, he frequently employs a derivation, usually false, to make a point. Like most English etymologists before him, he was seriously hampered by an ignorance of Anglo-Saxon. The most elementary knowledge would have prevented his

¹ Letter to Rogers, Clayden's *Rogers and His Contemporaries*, I, 192.

² See Poole's letter to Coleridge in Mrs. Sanford's *Thomas Poole and His Friends*, I, 280.

³ *Works*, VI, 279. Leibnitz had long since overthrown the belief that Hebrew was the original language. F. von Schlegel's *The Language and Wisdom of the Indians*, which laid down the lines of Indo-European philology, had appeared in 1808.

blunder in *The Watchman* (III, 76), where he says that Whitsuntide, Whittentide, was the time of choosing the wits or wise men to the Witenagemot. Again, in his remarks about the article in *Table Talk*,¹ he seems to be guessing about the simplest facts of the history of the language. The heaviest count against Coleridge in all this is his entire unconsciousness of his limitations. The following conversation is an amusing example of his dogmatic pretensions and of his astounding power of self-delusion:

Horne Tooke was once holding forth on language, when, turning to me, he asked me if I knew what the meaning of the final *-ive* was in English words. I said I thought I could tell what he, Horne Tooke himself, thought. "Why, what?" said he. "*Vis*," I replied; and he acknowledged that I had guessed right. I told him, however, that I could not agree with him, but believed that the final *-ive* came from *-ick*—*vicus*, ὄϊ κοσ; the root denoting collectivity, and that it was opposed to the final *-ing*, which signifies separation, particularity, and individual property, from *ingle*, a hearth, or one man's place or seat; ὄϊ κοσ, *vicus*, denoted an aggregation of *ingles*. The alteration of the *c* and *k* of the root into the *v* was evidently the work of the digamma power, and hence we find the *-icus* and *-ivus* indifferently as finals in Latin. . . . Horne Tooke upon this said nothing to my etymology; but I believe he found he could not make a fool of me, as he did of Godwin and some other of his butts.²

This may have passed very well with the Highgate audience, but if any one of them had taken the trouble to consult the *Diversions of Purley* (2d ed., p. 675) he might have turned the joke back on Coleridge with good effect, for Tooke himself there gives the very explanation which Coleridge claimed to have propounded, even to the suggestion of the digamma as an intermediary step, and it was undoubtedly from this source that Coleridge derived the wisdom with which he pictures himself to have confounded a rival philologist in this truly imaginary conversation.

As a contributor to the science of language Coleridge's observations are in the highest degree worthless. There is, however, one phase of his philological reflection which seems to me to be of considerable importance. Many of his remarks connect themselves with questions of literary effect and combine the critical with the purely linguistic point of view. As Coleridge is concerned with the

¹ *Works*, VI, 309.

² *Table Talk (Works)*, VI, 477.

qualities of excellence and difference in prose and poetic style, so he is also with the relative effects of different languages or of the same language in different stages of its development. In insisting on the individuality of languages Coleridge allies himself with a phase of the critical movement to preserve the national traditions in literature. His predecessors were both German and English. Welsted, for example, had expatiated on the acquired and natural advantages of the English tongue, the latter being such "as the other modern languages do not possess or not with equal happiness, as the power of compounding words, the variety of verse, the rhyme natural," etc.¹

In like manner Coleridge uses his linguistic knowledge and his critical sense to define in detail, and often keenly, the individuality of languages. He speaks of the perfection of the Greek, comparing the Italian and Spanish, points out the value of the particles, comments on the expressiveness of the dual, and distinguishes the nature of Greek compounds, "the happy marriage of sweet sounds," which in our language are mere printers' compound epithets.² He notes how "in all societies there exists an instinct of growth, a certain collective unconscious good sense, working progressively to desynonymize those words of originally the same meaning which the conflux of dialects has supplied to the more homogeneous languages, as the Greek and German, and which the same cause, joined with the accidents of translation from the original work of different countries, occasion in mixed languages like our own."³ Applied to particular literary types and to special authors, observations of this sort tend to slip over into the domain of literary criticism. Thus Coleridge maintains somewhat fancifully that English, by virtue of its composite character, is most appropriate to drama, "for it contains the harvest of the unconscious wisdom of various nations." He recognizes a definite relation between the genius of language and prose style, as in the lecture on Boccaccio,⁴ where he says that the long inwoven periods were natural in Greek but are foreign even in Latin

¹ "Dissertation Concerning the Perfection of the English Language," Welsted's *Works*, ed. Nichols, 1787.

² Notes on Chapman's *Homer, Essays and Lectures*, p. 356.

³ *Biographia literaria*, chap. iv (Shawcross ed.), I, 61. See also Coleridge's note. The remark quoted above is altogether the best philological observation which Coleridge anywhere makes.

⁴ *Miscellanies* (ed. Ashe), p. 100.

and particularly so in Teutonic. He finds the want of adverbs in the *Iliad* to be a trait of the "objective style." From this it is but a step to the kind of criticism which constitutes one of Coleridge's most significant contributions, the comparison and philosophic analysis of prose and poetic diction. He distinguishes a specifically dramatic diction in Shakespeare, Milton, and Massinger, as he had recognized a specifically dramatic language in the English. It is in the same spirit that he maintains the validity of a poetic style fundamentally different from that of prose, in opposition to Wordsworth's contention that they are the same.¹

If Coleridge's interest in the qualities and varieties of languages is closely associated with his criticism of literary styles and manners, his study of the older literatures of modern Europe is similarly connected both with his general critical activity and with his poetry. To what extent did Coleridge share in the mediaevalism of the English and German romantic schools in its more scholarly aspects? It must be admitted that mediaeval literature was with him no such exclusive and absorbing study as it was with Scott or Ritson. It is rather but one somewhat restricted phase of his eager literary curiosity. Coleridge's instinct, like Herder's, was to inquire broadly into the literary activity of the human spirit in all nations and periods. We have already noted the range of his German studies, directed toward a history of mediaeval German literature. In the course of his reading under Tychsen he appears to have acquired familiarity with the chief monuments of older German literature. He speaks appreciatively of Otfrid and translates a selection into attractive verse. Brandl thinks the passage to be closely related to the night scene in "Christabel"; it is certainly the source of the "Christmas Carol." Here then is a point of contact between Coleridge's mediaeval research and his creative work. His acquaintance with the *Minnesänger* leaves also an echo in the "Mutual Passion." The reading of Hans Sachs could scarcely afford an impetus to Coleridge's muse, but he speaks of "the rude strains of the cobbler of Nürenberg" as having given him at least a modest pleasure.² Coleridge's dramatic interests led him to pay special attention to the German

¹ *Biographia literaria*, chap. xviii (Shawcross ed.), II, 43 ff.

² For errors in Coleridge's remarks about Hans Sachs see note to *Biographia Literaria* (*Works*), III, 720.

mediaeval drama. He had transcribed at Helmstadt Hans Sachs's comedy, *Die ungleichen Kinder Evä*, and in his second lecture of 1818 he regaled his audience with an amusing analysis of the piece, his own fertile imagination supplying several picturesque touches not to be found in the original.¹ In his sketch of the evolution of mediaeval drama Coleridge follows Schlegel in the main,² but he had picked up in Italy some details relating to the extravagant presentations of the Christmas mysteries, and he is, so far as I know, original in finding in the Devil and the Vice genuine ancestors of Harlequin and the Clown.

Coleridge's relation to the more usual mediaeval interests of the English romanticists—namely, popular literature, the metrical romances, and the antiquities of popular custom and belief—demands a somewhat careful definition. Save for a brief discussion of the origin of the Maypole (*The Watchman*, Vol. III) and a few observations on folk customs which had interested him in Germany³ there is no evidence that he was touched in any way by mere antiquarian curiosity about the life of the past and its survivals. Hence there is in his poetry no imaginative reconstruction of the Middle Ages in their external aspects. On the other hand Coleridge's conception of literature as an evolution corresponding with the development of the human mind through its various stages led him to devote some attention in his lectures to the more primitive forms of expression represented in ballad and romance.⁴ Primarily, however, his interest in such materials was psychological, philosophical, and imaginative. They were to him the evidence of the instinct of the human mind toward belief in the supernatural, and as such they engaged his deepest attention. It was with this object that he aspired to write a treatise on "dreams, visions, ghosts, witchcraft," etc. For this sort of material Coleridge had a temperamental affinity quite different from Scott's merely curious interest, or from the artificial pretense of

¹ *Works*, IV, 238. Cain's bloody nose, the cuff bestowed by him on Adam, etc., are comic additions, conceived by Coleridge quite in the spirit of the original. His account of the last scene is almost entirely spurious. Either he wearied of the labor of transcription before he reached Act V, or he neglected to refer to his notes while preparing his discourse.

² *Progress of the Drama (Works)*, IV, 29 ff.

³ *New Monthly Magazine*, XLV, 218.

⁴ See the first, second, and third of the lectures of 1818; cf. his remarks on the analogy between the Homeric poems and the English romances.

belief. With Coleridge the willing suspension of reason was something more than a literary and poetic phenomenon. Superstition, derived from popular sources, blending with his own consciousness of supersensuous reality, determines the essential imaginative content of his poetry. Thus in "The Three Graves," "The Ancient Mariner," and "Christabel," three familiar folk motives—the curse, the taboo, and the serpent woman—are assimilated with a completeness possible only to a poet to whom these beliefs not only afford an insight into human psychology but are the symbolic expressions of man's authentic relation to the unseen world. It is through this fundamental kinship of temperament and belief that Coleridge is enabled to penetrate to the spiritual essence of mediaeval life, while remaining indifferent to its outward forms. From the purely literary standpoint also Coleridge, like Wordsworth, was attracted toward the popular lyric, ballad, and romance, as is evident from his translation of "Wenn Ich ein Vöglein wär" from the *Wunderhorn*¹, by his imitation of ballad style in "The Ancient Mariner," "The Dark Ladie,"² etc., and by his revival of the romance form in "Christabel."

Toward the Scandinavian studies, which had by Coleridge's time become popular in England, he and his group had always shown a friendly interest, but the ground remained practically untrodden by his feet. Coleridge sent to Wordsworth a copy of Cottle's *Translations from Icelandic Poetry* (1797). He had read David Cranz's *History of Greenland* and the *Eddas*, and, as we have seen, had at least dabbled in the Danish and Swedish tongues, but neither in his poetry nor in his criticism does he show any evidence of having come fairly in contact with the northern source of romantic inspiration.

Of the various fields of modern literature in English with which Coleridge occupied himself, the Elizabethan drama is the only one in which his work is of a character to require close examination in this paper. We may select his rather extensive Shakespearean studies as a final example of the methods and results of his scholarship. Coleridge shared with Lamb a new enthusiasm for even the minor playwrights of the Elizabethan age, especially for Massinger, but he

¹ "Something Childish but Very Natural," *Poems*, p. 146.

² For an analysis of Coleridge's relation to the ballad see C. W. Stork, "The Influence of the Popular Ballad on Wordsworth and Coleridge," *PMLA*, XXIX, 299 ff.

regarded them less for their own sakes than as a means of obtaining a just estimate of the great luminary for whom he entertained an admiration amounting almost to superstitious awe. While Lamb is eclectic and antiquarian in his criticism, Coleridge, here as elsewhere, is at least in aim and general trend scientific and historical, as well as aesthetic. To the study of Shakespeare he devoted himself persistently throughout his life. At Cambridge he wrote essays to vindicate Shakespeare's art, and in the conversations of his last years he was still dispensing appreciative comments, elucidating obscure passages, pronouncing on questions of authorship, philosophizing about the characters, and emending the text. If Coleridge's Shakespeare criticism is honeycombed with error and distorted by wildness of judgment, it is not for want of a proper devotion to the object, nor is it for want of a critical ideal. Throughout his discussion of the dramas Coleridge shows a sincere desire to get at the meaning, to distinguish the genuine from the spurious, and to see the works in their proper literary and historical relations.

In this aim he is often too much dominated by the desire to find Shakespeare free from all imperfection. He strongly inclines to deny the poet's responsibility for whatever his own literary sense is unable to approve. Thus he repeatedly affirms that the Porter scene in *Macbeth* is an interpolation, but, finding in it one phrase—"the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire"—which is worthy of the master's pen, he is driven to the theory that Shakespeare accepted a "disgusting" interpolation of the actors and added to it this touch of genius.¹ In another passage (*Julius Caesar*, III, i), he refuses to recognize an obvious pun because, in his opinion, it mars a fine passage, though he knows perfectly well that it is in entire accord with Elizabethan practice. The conflict between the historical and the appreciative attitude in Coleridge is well illustrated in his opinions regarding the stage presentation of the dramas. His instinct inclined him to agree with Lamb that Shakespeare ought only to be read, yet he was fully conscious of the intimate relation of the plays to the stage and of the critical necessity of viewing them in the light of stage

¹ Coleridge's commentary on Shakespeare is for the most part contained in the notes on the various plays, *Works*, IV, 73 ff. Since the passages referred to are easily located, specific references will not ordinarily be given except to the acts and scenes of the plays.

conditions. "The condition of the stage and the character of the times in which a great poet flourished must be taken into account in considering the question as to his judgment."

Setting aside the purely literary and philosophical aspects of Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism, we find him chiefly concerned with questions of authorship, with the problem of chronology, and with the text. At three periods of his life he attempted a classification of the plays on a chronological basis. A comparison of these classifications is, as Furness remarks,¹ a study rather of Coleridge's mind than of Shakespeare's. Baffled by the scantiness of the external evidence collected by Malone, Coleridge makes the initial blunder of rejecting such evidence as there was. "If he were to adopt any theory," he told Collier, "it would be rather psychological and pathological than chronological." Yet in 1802 he had set down a chronological arrangement based on "the internal evidence of the writings themselves." In the first epoch he places what he calls *Uebergangswerke*—*Henry VI*, the old *King John*, *Pericles*, and other doubtful plays; in the second *All's Well* and *Romeo and Juliet* in their first versions, and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*; in the third and fourth the comedies and later histories; in the fifth ("The period of beauty was now passed; and that of grandeur succeeds") the tragedies, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and lastly *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline*. It would have been well if Coleridge had rested with this arrangement, which, except in the first group, where the fallibility even of his purely literary sense is well illustrated, is far from bad—is indeed more nearly in accord with modern opinion than Malone's latest chronology. The later attempts, except that he makes *Love's Labour's Lost* the earliest of the plays, are much inferior. *The Tempest*, for example, in 1810, gets into the second period and *Cymbeline* comes before the tragedies. The historical plays are here put last, "in order to be able to show my reasons for rejecting some whole plays and very many scenes in others." The weaknesses of the subjective method reflect themselves in the utter instability of his ideas. In his two subsequent discussions of the subject (1811 and 1819)² the system is modified at random.

¹ *Variorum, Cymbeline*, 445.

² *Miscellanies* (edited by Ashe), p. 59.

On one point Coleridge's literary insight enabled him to make a genuinely significant contribution. In all the chronologies he treats *All's Well That Ends Well* as an early play, assuming the existence of an earlier version, afterward worked up afresh. The idea that the play was originally a counterpart of *Love's Labour's Lost* was not a novel one, but Coleridge was the first to point out, as he did to Collier in 1811 and again in 1818, the two divergent styles in the present play.¹

Coleridge's observations regarding authorship are not worth notice, except that they show his preoccupation with this problem and again reveal his tendency to base his judgment on subjective impressions. As a result his opinions are often unstable and self-contradictory, as if he had difficulty in remembering at one time the profound convictions of another. According to Crabb Robinson, Coleridge and Lamb erred together in the opinion that not a line of *Titus Andronicus* was Shakespeare's; but Coleridge later observed, with truer instinct, that Shakespeare was responsible for some passages. Again, while at one time he affirmed that Shakespeare wrote nothing of *Richard III* except the character of Richard—"certainly not the Lady Anne scene"²—he brings forward in a lecture the mediaeval tale of *Ywain* as the source from which "Shakespeare derived the strongly marked and extraordinary scene between Richard III and Lady Anne."

Of more importance than his attempts to fix Shakespearean chronology or to settle perplexing questions of authorship are Coleridge's labors as a commentator and textual critic. His rather wide familiarity with Elizabethan literature, his keen though not infallible instinct for the Shakespearean manner and point of view, and his power of suggestive and illuminating interpretation enabled him to make some permanent contribution to the body of Shakespearean commentary, a contribution which justifies the frequent appearance of his name in the notes of the modern Variorum edition. But here, as elsewhere, one must note the inevitable limitations. In the first

¹ Tolman, in his essay on *Love's Labour's Lost*, is in error in saying that the view that the play is a second version is not found in Coleridge. See Collier's edition of Shakespeare (1858, II, 529), and Coleridge's observation in the chronology of 1802—"afterwards worked up afresh, *umgearbeitet*, especially Parolles."

² Crabb Robinson's *Diary*, I, 309-10. Cf. *Works*, IV, 238.

place, Coleridge is deficient in his attention to the labors of his predecessors. He uses, as a rule, only the editions of Theobald and Warburton, though he shows familiarity also with Rowe, Farmer, Malone, and others. His shortcomings in this respect are illustrated by his frequent failure to observe that his comments have been anticipated, and by his adopting an error in interpretation which a knowledge of the better editions would have enabled him to correct.¹

Coleridge's indifference to the editors is partly motivated by his scorn of them, and some of his keenest observations are devoted to the ridicule of their ineptitudes. His is the sentiment of the man of genius, who resents the dull attempt of the scholar to elucidate his literary idol by mere learning. "Oh! Theobald," he ejaculates on one occasion, "what a commentator thou wast when thou would'st profess to understand Shakespeare instead of collating the text."

In his strictures on his predecessors Coleridge is generally quite right. Again and again he assails their errors with a keen precision which leaves no room for further argument, and these remarks constitute the sanest and most illuminating part of his commentary.² But his own missteps in the treacherous ways of Shakespearean exegesis are of a character almost to have entitled him to join the sorry group of commentators who invoke the outraged spirit of the bard in Coleridge's projected satire.³ In the matter of emendation the ridicule which he lavishes upon Theobald or Warburton or Malone comes back upon himself. Except when confronted with the meddlings of others he is anything but scientifically conservative about the text; and he is guilty of some suggestions which are unrivaled even in the eighteenth century for wild absurdity. Such

¹ See, for example, his fruitless speculation on the meaning of "loach" (*I Henry IV*, II, i, 23), which, though boggled by Warburton, had been correctly given by Johnson, Steevens, and Malone.

² See, for example, his attack on Theobald's defense of the supposed contradiction in Hamlet's "Undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns" after he has recently interviewed a ghost. Theobald's heresy is not yet dead, but C. is in accord with the best modern opinion.

The conjecture "spare me" for "Phillip? Sparrow!" in *King John* (I, i, 232) is justly made game of by Coleridge, who correctly explains the remark as an allusion to Skelton's poem. For other instances of corrective criticism see notes on *Macbeth*, I, iii, 37; *Winter's Tale*, III, ii, 187; *Othello*, I, ii, 21; *Antony and Cleopatra*, I, i, 14; *Hamlet*, IV, vii, 118; *Julius Caesar* I, ii, 86; *Twelfth Night*, I, i, 14.

On the other hand Coleridge can do justice to a good comment, even in Warburton or Theobald, when he sees it. Cf. note to *Timon*, I, ii, 117.

³ *Anima Poetae*, p. 88.

are his substitution of "monarch sire" for "mounting sire" (*Henry V*, II, iv, 57), and his classic transformation of Macbeth's "blanket of the dark" into the grotesque "blank height of the dark."¹ These absurdities, carelessly thrown off in conversation, are not seriously to be held against Coleridge; but when he would change "die" to the commonplace "live" in *Henry V*'s

We would not die in that man's company
Who fears his fellowship to die with us,

we feel that he has shown a bluntness of literary perception not very different from the worst he abuses in Warburton. In his comment on *Merry Wives*, I, iii, 61, he wilfully overlooks an obvious meaning and emends in a fashion truly ingenious in error.²

Such wild guesses at truth are, after all, not very common in Coleridge. His very natural inclination was to settle nice questions in interpretation by his literary judgment, and while this is sometimes perverse, more often it guides him truly, making his comments suggestive even when they are not wholly acceptable.

Of that part of his comment which illustrates the philological and scientific trend in his intellectual constitution there are examples in his notes on the learned commentators. Alien as antiquarianism was to his interests, he is ready enough to bring mere learning to bear on Shakespeare whenever he conceives it to be illuminating. Occasionally his erudition is of the flighty sort displayed in the perversities of the *Table Talk*. Opinion may differ as to the soundness of his startling transformation of Doll Tearsheet into Doll Tear-street (street-walker, from *terere stratam*, thereby explaining the prince's remark, "This Doll Tearsheet should be some road."),³ but when he tries to connect "enkindle" in Banquo's "That trusted home might yet enkindle you unto the throne" with "kind, kin, as where rabbits are said to kindle," we see the madman and the poet playing at ducks and drakes with the scholar, the result being a species of Shakespearean erudition which is, in truth, such stuff as philological dreams

¹ *Table Talk (Works)*, VI, 312 and 508-9.

² "As many devils entertain; and 'To her, Boy, say I.'" Coleridge would read "As many devils entered swine!"

³ *II Henry IV*, II, ii, 183. W. S. Walker believed that Coleridge's emendation should have been adopted long ago (*A Critical Examination of the Text of Shakespeare*, III, 135).

are made of. Yet Coleridge's linguistic curiosity, when sensibly directed to the observation of Elizabethan usage, undoubtedly helped him to interpret the text of the plays aright.¹

In general then Coleridge's commentary, though wild enough at times, is not altogether a failure, even from the scholarly point of view. At its worst it shows him ready to make a close and critical study of the text the basis of the soaring structure of his appreciative and philosophical interpretation. If he is warped in his view of the facts by his tendency to rely on subjective impression and vain hypothesis, he is nevertheless here as elsewhere a seeker after truth, and it is due to the complexity of his consciousness that he was incapable of becoming a Theobald or a Malone.

The combination of traits revealed in these Shakespeare notes is, as we have seen, characteristic of the entire range of Coleridge's literary studies. We are confronted everywhere with evidence of the psychological weaknesses which impaired the validity of his search after basic fact—his constitutional inaccuracy, his proneness to sacrifice the fruits of observation and scientific reason to what he believed to be religious and philosophical truth, the treacherous strength of the imagination, which made him unable to distinguish the thoughts of others from his own and, in general, to see reality uncolored by the rainbow hues of his own consciousness. Robertson's scathing analysis of Coleridge's mental constitution² is hardly too severe; but Coleridge's "intellectual dishonesty" is seldom or never deliberate. It is closely associated, moreover, with the faculty which made him succeed as a poet where he failed as a scholar, as Robertson himself recognizes, when he says of "The Ancient Mariner," "The quality which in Coleridge had to serve for strength of character, namely, intellectual zeal, here attains to a sincerity which is perhaps

¹ The following interesting comment shows him hesitating, in his really earnest desire to find Shakespeare's true text and meaning, between the solid claims of his knowledge of the language and the more treacherous allurements of his sense of style:

O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
That give a coasting welcome ere it come.
[*T. and C.*, IV, v, 19.]

Coleridge thinks that it should perhaps be "accosting" ("Accost her, Knight, accost"). Yet the other is "so Shakespearean," taking coasting as epithet and adjective of welcome. But then he cannot readily understand the meaning unless "ere it come" is changed to "ere they land." And so, regretfully, he reads "accosting welcome" and explains "that give welcome to a salute ere it comes." The emendation is adopted in all modern editions.

² *New Essays toward a Critical Method.*

only possible in virtue of a weak relation to actuality.” The intellectual zeal, had it been uncrossed by the wilder metaphysical and imaginative strain and unimpaired by the ravages of opium, might have made of Coleridge a literary scholar of wider range and more penetrating insight than any of his contemporaries; but, unlike Goethe, he was incapable of combining a steady hold on outward truth with the ideality, the spiritual vision, the subjective consciousness of the poet. He is a true child of the romantic age in both his weakness and his strength.

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